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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 001980

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SUBJECT: PRESSING GOS ON BURMA'S PARTICIPATION AT ASEAN AND
EAST ASIA SUMMITS

REF: STATE 148530

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia L. Herbold. Reasons 1.4(b)(d)

11. (C) Summary: The DCM met with MFA Permanent Secretary Peter Ho to express serious concern over Singapore's invitation to new Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein to attend the ASEAN Summit in Singapore in November and to urge Singapore not to go back to business as usual with the Burmese regime. Ho asserted that Singapore has no choice but to maintain its links with the Burmese regime, no matter how odious it is. He argued that Singapore, as ASEAN Chair, has to invite Burma to an ASEAN Summit, just as the United States cannot exclude leaders like Castro or Ahmadinejad from attending UN meetings. Singapore has no intention of "sweeping Burma's problems under the carpet" and remains active in reaching out to other key countries in support of the efforts of UN Special Adviser Gambari. Ho said Gambari was "leery" of proposals to set up "parallel tracks" with the regime which could "dilute his efforts." End Summary.

Invitation to Burmese PM

12. (C) The DCM met with MFA Permanent Secretary Peter Ho on October 30 to express serious concern over Singapore's invitation to new Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein to attend the ASEAN Summit in Singapore in November and to urge Singapore (reftel) not to go back to business as usual with the Burmese regime. Ho said the Burmese regime will not see the invitation as business as usual. The regime knows the situation in Burma will be an issue at the ASEAN Summit and related meetings. He asserted that Singapore must maintain its communication links with the regime, no matter how odious it is. Unlike the United States, Singapore cannot turn its back on Burma because the two countries are part of the same region, Ho asserted.

Burma at the Summits

13. (C) PM Thein Sein will likely come to Singapore for the summits in November, Ho said. He argued that Singapore, as ASEAN Chair, has to invite Burma to an ASEAN Summit, just as the United States can not exclude leaders like Castro or Ahmadinejad from attending UN meetings. The DCM said Singapore's invitation creates the impression that ASEAN is taking a step back in its treatment of Burma. Ho said it is not a question of sending the right or wrong signal -- Burma is a member of ASEAN. Ho claimed that the other ASEAN

members would be "up in arms" if Singapore did not include Burma.

¶4. (C) The DCM urged Singapore to push for strong statements on Burma at the summits. Ho said he cannot "prejudge" the matter and said any possible statements will depend on the outcome of the leaders' discussions. Furthermore, it was too soon to say what impact the visits next month to Burma by UN Special Adviser Gambari and UN Human Rights Rapporteur Pinheiro will have. Ho did say the leaders at the summits will tell Burma that it cannot return to the status quo ante.

Not Business As Usual

¶5. (C) Ho argued that it was not business as usual for Singapore with Burma. Singapore has been and remains very active on the issue and has no intention of "sweeping Burma's problems under the carpet." Singapore should be given credit for its leadership in pushing through the ASEAN Chair Statement of September 27. In addition, Foreign Minister George Yeo visited Beijing and Tokyo from October 25-27 to discuss Burma and will go to New Delhi for further discussion on Burma in November. (Note: Ho declined to specify when in November. End Note.) Ho also referred to FM Yeo's visit to a Burmese temple in Singapore on October 19 where he said he stood with the people of Burma.

Sanctions Will Not Work (Except for Air Bagan)

¶6. (C) The United States is looking for "quick and morally

SINGAPORE 00001980 002 OF 002

comfortable solutions" for Burma, Ho said, but examining Burma's track record over the last fifty years, it is clear that the regime is immune to outside pressure because it has decided to isolate itself. Ho claimed that sanctions are mere "pinpricks" that will have no effect. The DCM said there is nothing wrong with the United States' pressing for timely action on Burma or with our taking a stand on moral, as opposed to "morally comfortable," grounds. The ASEAN Chair's Statement of September 27 very appropriately took a position on moral grounds, he pointed out.

¶7. (C) In response to the DCM's question, Ho confirmed local press reports that Air Bagan has suspended its flights to Singapore. He said that banks in Singapore had "pulled the rug out from under them" due to the impact of U.S. sanctions. The banks had judged the matter on their own without prompting by the GOS, according to Ho.

Supporting Gambari

¶8. (C) Ho said that Gambari, who is presently in Singapore waiting for permission to enter Burma, seeks statements of support from the international community that he is the person to engage with the Burmese regime. Gambari met with FM Yeo on October 29 and told him he is happy with the support he is getting from ASEAN, China, Japan, and India, according to Ho. (Note: The Ambassador's October 30 meeting with Gambari is reported septel. End Note.) Ho said Gambari is "leery" of proposals to establish "parallel tracks" to the Burmese regime which would "dilute his efforts." Ho noted that Thailand had proposed multi-party talks to deal with Burma, while Australia was interested in establishing an East Asia Summit (EAS) troika or EAS envoy to approach the regime and report back to the EAS foreign ministers. Ho claimed that the other ASEAN and EAS members did not support these initiatives.

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